

ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY
INTERVIEW WITH
BERNARD L. FOY

BY - CHARLES W. CRAWFORD
TRANSCRIBER - BETTY WILLIAMS
ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE
MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY



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APRIL 10, 1974

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PLACE Orlando, Florida

DATE April 10, 1974

Bernard L. Foy
(Interviewee)

Charles W. Crawford
(For the Mississippi Valley Archives
of the John Willard Brister Library
of Memphis State University)



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THIS IS THE ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE OF MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY. THIS PROJECT IS "AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY." THE PLACE IS ORLANDO, FLORIDA. THE DATE IS APRIL 10, 1974, AND THE INTERVIEW IS WITH MR. BERNARD L. FOY, FORMERLY WITH THE TENNESSEE VALLEY AUTHORITY. THE INTERVIEW IS BY DR. CHARLES W. CRAWFORD, DIRECTOR OF THE MEMPHIS STATE UNIVERSITY ORAL HISTORY RESEARCH OFFICE. TRANSCRIBED BY BETTY WILLIAMS. INTERVIEW #1.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Foy, I suggest we start by getting some brief biographical information about you from the beginning up until the time that you became associated with TVA. I'd suggest that we take whatever time you want for this and then proceed into your work with the Authority.

MR. FOY: Prior to coming to the Tennessee Valley Authority, I was a student at the University of Illinois in Graduate Library School. I was entering the advanced program there when the opportunity came to join the staff at TVA in the Order Department of the Technical Library. This offer [came] in February, 1937 and I went to Knoxville and, as many of you will recall, that was the year of the disastrous floods. It was necessary to go all the way to Chattanooga to get to Knoxville. I served as Porter Librarian and as head of the Reference Department and then I was appointed Chief Librarian



in 1942, I believe. I remained in this capacity from 1942 until June, 1968 when I decided to take my early retirement and move to Florida and enjoy the sunshine and work in an academic library. Also to put into practice some of my philosophy of library service that I actually learned at the TVA Library--and this we are doing.

DR. CRAWFORD: Thank you. Where and when were you born, Mr. Foy?

MR. FOY: I was born in Marion, Indiana, September 19, 1911.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have all of your education at the University of Illinois?

MR. FOY: No, I got my undergraduate degree at Indiana University. I proceeded from there with a job at Illinois and was able to move on to Illinois during the Depression and went to school there in 1936 and 1937.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you in school in '36 and '37 while you were working?

MR. FOY: Yes, I was carrying a full load and going to school.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you doing library work at that time?

MR. FOY: I was doing library work, and also working in a cafeteria so that I could get my meals.

DR. CRAWFORD: Then you had some experience by the time you went to work at TVA.

MR. FOY: I was well aware of library administration and



library work from the very beginning because I started out at Indiana University as a student assistant in the library as a freshman.

DR. CRAWFORD: Can you give information about your first acquaintance with TVA? Why did you decide to take the job and what did you know of the Agency at that time?

MR. FOY: Well, this may be difficult for you to believe, but in 1936-37 jobs were very very scarce. I was sending out short resumes to various and sundry places looking for any kind of a job. I sent a letter to the TVA and I got an application form which I submitted back to them. I had submitted many other applications and basically I was looking for a job. I really knew very little about the organization. As soon as I began corresponding with TVA, then I started my little research program and found out what it was all about and it did excite me and I did want to be a part of it. Fortunately, I had an opportunity to join the staff.

DR. CRAWFORD: You considered it a challenging position, evidently. Was the salary scale comparable with other library work at the time?

MR. FOY: At the time the salary scale was . . .

Well, let me put it this way. When I accepted the job I went to the director of the Library School to report to her and she told me that it was the highest paid job of any of the graduating students. It wasn't very high, incidentally by comparison. (Laughter).

DR. CRAWFORD: What did you find when you first arrived?

I know the library had been organized.

What sort of staff and what sort of organization did you find?

MR. FOY: Well, I found a very highly efficient organization under the direction of Mr. Bauer, who was our Chief Librarian. I found also that it was a small library designed to serve the staff and not to be an extensive collection at all, but to be complete in the resource materials as it related to the Tennessee Valley Authority. I found a very enthusiastic staff also.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember the approximate size of the staff.

MR. FOY: The approximate size of the staff would be about 10.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were all of them working in Knoxville at the library itself?

MR. FOY: At the time that I came aboard we were just establishing a branch library in Chattanooga and we were moving one of our staff members down there. It was one person and it was part of the Information Office in Chattanooga. The secretary of the information man was handling the telephone requests and that sort of thing.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have a library program to reach construction workers or people in other areas at that time?



MR. FOY:

We had a library program of which was under the direction of Miss Mary Rothrock and which was an entirely separate program from the program that I later directed. This program was designed to provide recreational reading for the workers and their families in the backwoods, the hills, the mountains of East Tennessee and North Carolina where they were more or less isolated there to do a job for TVA. But they did not have access to many of the facilities that were available to us.

DR. CRAWFORD:

I believe Mr. Foy, that when a young librarian goes out of college to his first job which is already in operation he is looking to see how it compares with what he has been taught in school. How did TVA's operations compare with what you had learned about library operation?

MR. FOY:

Well, frankly I learned very little about special libraries while I was at the University of Illinois. The special library programs around this country were rather new at this time except for major corporation libraries and certain government libraries. So that in none of my courses at Illinois did I get any kind of a briefing on the type of special libraries that are now in operation in many corporations and government agencies.

DR. CRAWFORD:

Were many such special libraries in operation at the time, or was TVA rather early with that?

MR. FOY:

Well, among government libraries, we were not early. Corporation Libraries, and I am think-

ing of the very large (telephone company, RCA and many of the other big corporations), did have their own special libraries, but there was an increase in the need for this kind of information as we moved along in the forties and fifties.

DR. CRAWFORD: Why had you learned as little as you had in a good library school--as I believe it was-- about special libraries? Was it simply not taught much at that time?

MR. FOY: It was not taught very much at that time. I never had an opportunity to take a course on special libraries. It was just not in the curriculum.

DR. CRAWFORD: Were you still developing procedures as you went along when you arrived at TVA in '37?

MR. FOY: Procedures for . . .

DR. CRAWFORD: For collecting material and making it available.

MR. FOY: Well, we have a policy statement at TVA which came along after I was there and I guess it was after I was Chief Librarian really in which we developed a policy statement for as a guideline for the total organization. Then we implemented that with a statement of how to do it. This was something that we did accomplish for them.

DR. CRAWFORD: I believe that TVA in all its divisions had to make a very close study of it operations in the congressional investigations which was possibly concluding about

the time of your arrival I am not sure.

MR. FOY: Yes, in 1938, yes. That's true.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you help study the purposes of the library?

MR. FOY: I was involved. I think Mr. Bauer was the librarian at the time. But I think he did submit a statement to the committee hearings. Our names of the staff appear in those hearings. We did assist also in the other departments the preparation of their statements and many cases they had to refer back to early documents of TYA. We had all the early documents, the congressional testimony and all the other technical information that was needed. So we did play a big hand in assisting our key people for this very important hearing.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have sufficient space for your work when you arrived?

MR. FOY: When I arrived we were on second floor of the Union building and we did have sufficient space. We seemed to outgrow it in a short time. As far as I know we have been crowded ever since then. I think though in defense. . . well, we have been crowded. We moved from the second floor to the first floor to the Union Building which was an easy access area. The ideal spot in my mind at that time--and which we later acquired--was on the first floor of the New Sprankle Building and we acquired that and we did have adequate space for a few years. But as far as I know the library is still located on that location. To me you need public

exposure like that because when you are that way you can give better service.

DR. CRAWFORD: It is located now on the front corner of the New Sprankle Building on the first floor where it is exposed publicly. What sort of use did you have for your material? What parts of the agency used it most?

MR. FOY: Well, this was my job to help promote the the use of the material for all departments. The engineers--and I must admit that most engineers that I know, and I love them--don't know how to use the library. We finally by a slow educational process--and I had to do this by meeting with the key people to explain to them--[explained] that we could do these jobs for them. We could do bibliographies, we could do anything and save time. So we did an awful lot of work for the engineers. We did a lot of work for top management. I might mention a few names right now because I think Mr. Lilienthal and Mr. Clapp and Mr. Wagner all realized the potential resources in that library. And they used them. They called on us, and they called on me usually, and I was on the hot seat until we found the answer. Our library had been used by a very large number of the employees--key people in the organization. It's a constant selling job. It is true with the library or with any academic library.

DR. CRAWFORD: What are some of the examples of uses made? Did you help prepare speeches for top management for example?

MR. FOY:

We would help to this extent. I got quite a lot of satisfaction out of that because I personally got involved with the speeches for some of the top management people. Now the way I got involved, the assignments would come down through the Information Office and Mr. Evans would call in one of his writers, and call me in, and we would sit down and sort of outline what we should do for the speech.

This is where I would pick up the outline and go back and give it to my reference people and I would assist them many times and pull all this material together. We had to be selective because many times you could turn up too much material--swamp them--and that is not the purpose of this. I had enough knowledge with my directors to know that they didn't want to be swamped. They wanted me to do some screening, and this is where I did fit into the picture--screening the material as I gave it to the writers to put it into the speech.

Now let me make one further comment. In many cases, in some cases we knew, most cases we probably knew who was making the speech, but in some cases, and I can cite one in particular because I was personally involved in it and I did a lot of research on it. A call came from the Chairman of the Board and he wanted some information on the subject: "Why Industry Moves Into the South", and also "Why it moves beyond the Tennessee Valley and into the further south" and we researched on that in our clips, our books, and magazines and everything else, and came up with some good information. Well, at that time I had a member of the



staff reading The Congressional Record and preparing a digest of the Record for the Board of Directors and the key officials of TVA, and we were getting a daily report on what happened in The Congressional Record-- a one or two page summary. One day we were running across this and here was the speech in The Congressional Record on this subject. By golly, we had done all the work on and no credit to us, but we got a lot of satisfaction out of knowing that we had a hand in that speech.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you remember who made that speech?

MR. FOY: Senator Kefauver.

DR. CRAWFORD: So that some of the defense of TVA in Congress really involved research efforts on the local scene.

MR. FOY: This has happened many times. We've known about it after the fact. But that is besides the point. Librarians get a lot of satisfaction out of knowing that they had a hand in doing this sort of thing. We don't care for the credit. I think this is one of the points about TVA. I think this represents esprit de corps that you have in an organization like this. Where you get out and pitch in and do your job and you really don't give a damn whether you get any credit for it or not. You want the credit to go to the organization and the Chairman of the Board who is the spokesman for Tennessee.

DR. CRAWFORD: I am guessing that very often you saw the results of your work that you could recognize in published speeches of the members of the Board?



MR. FOY: I've seen it in many speeches and I've seen it in technical reprotos for TVA because we've worked with the engineers as I've said before, on their technical projects and on each dam. We are always called in on that.

Let me cite another example: Way back in the late thirties or early forties (early forties perhaps) we were considering building a reversible pump turbine at Hiwassee Dam. One of the first things (this was in the forties because I was Chief Librarian at the time) that we did when this decision was made to look into this possibility. The decision hadn't been made to do it yet, but we were looking into the possibility. The engineers were. We had to do a literature search to see what was available on the subject. We did a bibliography--an extensive bibliography--we published it and got it to the engineers first and later on it was published. After it was published we had it sent to several prominent engineering magazines and it was picked up and listed around the country and we had many many requests for that bibliography on the reversible pump turbine. I can cite other examples because this is where TVA was experimenting in something--pioneering--and we were called in to do the literature search to see what had been done on this thing.

DR. CRAWFORD: Many of these things in TVA I know, were fairly new. Did any of the engineering staff ever publish articles or make speeches?

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MR. FOY: Many of them published articles and usually they sought [our help] and came to us for some assistance. Maybe just the address of an engineering journal, but very seldom that. (I am just being facetious, really). But they would come to us perhaps for us to help document the bibliography or to see if they had the correct forms and that sort of thing. They would have a special problem relating to their article and we would be asked to research on that particular point. We would do it. There was not a charge for the service. We were a part of the administrative and general expense, I believe that is what they call it. You don't operate with an accountant when you come to us, you come to us and state your problem and we are paid to dig out the information and present it to you. I think this is one of the big advantages of the organization where the library fit into this organization. We operate right out of the top level in the organization. Right below the Board of Directors and General Manager's Office we operated. This made us responsible to serve equally well all the departments in TVA. This we tried to do. We did that with a large library in Chattanooga, at what is now known as the world's largest fertilizer library in Muscle Shoals, and both of these were under my supervision.

DR. CRAWFORD: Do you know who was responsible for the original administrative decision to put the library that high on the organizational structure, that is, underneath the General Manager's Office?

MR. FOY: Well, I think great credit should go to the

original Board of Directors. They are the ones that first of all decided that they needed a library. This was one of their first decisions and that is what pleases a good librarian to hear that they were recognizing that kind of a need. And it operated right out of the--they called it the Coordinator's Office. But we hung our hat right at the top, and this was good. It was good for several reasons: It gave us easy access with the Board, easy access to the General Manager as well as all department heads. During my period with TVA I had an opportunity to be on a first name basis with practically all the people. Nevertheless, it helped the library program because they weren't reluctant to ask me maybe how to spell a word or maybe a technical question. Anything they wanted to ask me they could ask me and I would get the answer.

DR. CRAWFORD: Well, that placement on the organizational chart gave you easy access to management, but it also gave management access to the specialized information that you could supply. Can you give some examples of how you made useful material available to the members of the Board and others?

MR. FOY: Oh yes. I mentioned The Congressional Record--and we did that--that was an automatic search. One of the responsibilities that we had--and I had these assigned to some of our reference people--all journals that would come into the library and we got a thousand or twelve hundred titles I believe, and would look



each issue over and examine each current issue for anything relating first of all to TVA. If we found anything relating to TVA, we would index it because we wanted to keep a permanent record of it of this publication. Then anything related to resource development that we thought would be of interest to our key people.

Okay, when we found articles like that, those will be brought to my attention and I would decide whether I will send them to the Board, General Council, General Manager or where they should go. If I decided they should go the Board, we'd make copies on the xerox machine and it would go to them. This was a service and I hope it is still being performed because it was a valuable service to our key people. Many times they have told me how much they appreciated that.

The same thing applied to our service as we read our many newspapers (70 or 80 newspapers that came in) and as we spotted news--editorial comment in particular--pro and con--mostly the con--we wanted to know what the people were saying against us. That information was xeroxed and sent right to the Board. There was no question about that we needed to get that out to the Board of Directors, Information, and key people so they would be alerted immediately about what was being said. In some cases rebuttals had to be made, replies had to be made directly to the editor and straighten out the facts.

DR. CRAWFORD: How current did you keep that list? How rapidly did you get it to them?

MR. FOY: Oh this was a daily occurrence. Every day!



DR. CRAWFORD: So they could expect to find on their desk material about as fast as it appeared.

MR. FOY: Well, as soon as we got it in and read the article and clipped it out and made the picture. I think another significant thing too is anything that went in to the Board of Directors, General Manager, key people--in went into the office under a tag from the Technical Library. So every day they saw the Technical Library's name.

DR. CRAWFORD: You did not have any budget problems, did you?

MR. FOY: No sir, I never had any budget problems. This is a very comfortable feeling because I am in the academic world now. Boy, do we have budget problems! I can honestly say that I had strong support all during my tenure at TVA. Now TVA had budget problems when it got to the congressional level. When it got into that level and TVA got a cut we would have to take a small percentage of it. I must say they were very generous and very kind to us in administering cuts.

DR. CRAWFORD: Mr. Foy, could you sum up some of the major useful accomplishments, as you see them that were made in the library at that time.

MR. FOY: During the period of time that I was at TVA, We had several functions: We had to serve our technical people, we had to serve our top management, and we had to serve all of our chemical people in the Muscle Shoals area, but we also

had a responsibility of keeping track of everything that appeared on the printed page about TYA. We knew we lived in a goldfish bowl up there--people wrote pro and con about us--and it was our responsibility to find those articles and have them on file and make them available to our people. So this was certainly one important part of this program. We not only made them available, we had them indexed so that they could be retrieved.

In the 1960's--early sixties--there came on the market an information system called the Mirocode. It is manufactured by Eastman-Kodak and we saw a real application of this system for our specific clipping files and our magazine files. We had a demonstration with our Board of Directors and they were impressed. And incidentally, this was the first time that the three members of the Board ever sat down together in a librarian's office of TVA and they scheduled the meeting for thirty minutes and they spent an hour and thirty minutes. I knew I had sold them a bill of goods because I was scratching around for about 32,000 dollars and I knew I didn't have the money in my budget. After they saw this and I put in my request and it went right on through. I felt very good with our demonstration with the Board. What we were able to do--and as far as I know are still doing--is to input material into this system with the proper codification so that you can retrieve information that you need instantaneously. And all you need are your index numbers and punch your numbers and on the screen appears your answer. I don't know if you have seen this or not, Dr. Crawford, but it is a fascinating thing and we



could get information immediately.

For example, one day one of the Chairmen was making a trip down the Valley, and his secretary called up and said he wanted to know--he was going to meet with a number of newspaper editors--and he wanted to know what their thinking was editorially. He mentioned the papers he wanted to know about. Well, I would say it was a matter of about fifteen minutes and we had that file searched for a period of six or seven years and the machine automatically prints out the copy. It was taken to him, he couldn't believe it that we could get it that fast, and we got a brownie point or two and he had his information and it made us all feel good. So that is the service that we really really think is unique in libraries. It is unfortunate that it is not in many libraries especially in special type libraries because it is a great tool for servicing your top management people.

We had other publications which I want to touch upon too. As many of you know, we had many foreign visitors. I keep in the present tense for some reason--I still think I am with TVA! We had many foreign visitors visiting the Tennessee Valley Authority over the years. In the beginning it started out in the Engineering Department. Mr. Van Court Hare, who is now deceased, worked with me on this and we were keeping a record of the number of foreign visitors, the country they were from, and their interest in TVA.

Then it got a little outside and beyond his control and he sort of turned the thing over to me and I took it over and we ended up actually

several years later publishing a book let of about a hundred pages showing some thirty-four countries who have visited TVA and who had learned certain aspects of our program which were applicable to their countries and had gone back to their countries to present and carry out a similar program. It also showed how many of our people--TVA people--had been loaned to these foreign countries. It was quite a large number of people. So this little publication was quite impressive. We had some narrative in there to tell something of the facts about the Tennessee Valley Authority as well as about the countries that visited. We had to research on each country. So as a result of that, Business Week got hold of that and did a full page story on it one day for us, so we were real thrilled with that. We've also had the TVA program bibliography, and the index bibliography which helped to identify references in the Technical Library. Of course, the library is the most complete library on TVA information.

DR. CRAWFORD:

Did you have the feeling when you were with TVA that if you thought of a worthwhile plan you could get it accepted?

MR. FOY:

Oh, yes, I think the microcode is the best example I can think of right now, because when I saw that the machine I thought I was going to need over \$30,000--that's still big money with libraries and we don't have that kind of change lying around--so I knew I had to do a selling job. First of all on my boss, the director of Information, Mr. Paul Evans, and then if

I could sell him on it well then I would have to sell the Board on it. We were successful in doing that. I guess that was my biggest sales pitch I made at TVA. I was constantly making a sales pitch for services to the employees and reminding them of the way our library could provide services to them. I did this through several channels. I always made it a point to have lunch with various different individuals in TVA--engineers, economists, we didn't have any historians, but other administrative personnel and so forth. And by doing this over lunch many times subjects would come up that would be discussed that I would volunteer the fact that we could do something to help you on that or we can get more information for you. I think this has helped our organization and has helped the library and helped us budget-wise.

DR. CRAWFORD: So you collected information both within the agency and without?

MR. FOY: Oh yes, very much so.

DR. CRAWFORD: It seems to me that TVA's management made some very important decisions during this period and a lot of the success of the Agency depended upon the accuracy and now and then upon the promptness of those decisions. It seems to me they were able to make these decisions a lot better because of the information that you supplied. Is that the assumption that you operated under?

MR. FOY: That is the assumption that I operated on, and that is the reason I feel I played a prominent part in the organization. And I think the fact I feel this way

is a fact our budgets were accepted when I made my budget requests, they were accepted by the director and the budget staff. We could not do this well with submitting false information and we tried to provide this kind of service and provide it properly because when a Chairman of the Board or any top man in our organization these people traveled and when they wanted it they wanted it now. They didn't want it a week from tomorrow. So we made it a point to drop everything and get it to them promptly. It has paid off--and it is getting late.

DR. CRAWFORD: Did you have enough staff to fill all their requests that they had?

MR. FOY: I think we had a good staff. We had an adequate staff to take care of this. We had a staff that was really dedicated to the organization and I was real thrilled to be a part of this staff. I feel like it was a tremendous organization. We think we got results.

DR. CRAWFORD: At the time that you left TVA, Mr. Foy, did you have the library system in the shape that you wanted it to be?

MR. FOY: Well, the system was in about the shape I wanted it to be except we needed additional space. We were just getting underway on our world fertilizer research library at Muscle Shoals. That has continued to grow, but I was in on that. As a matter of fact I suggested the fertilizer abstracts publication which now I think originates out of Muscle Shoals, that started out

in the library and has been moved out of the library since that time. Space-wise we are hurting and eventually there will be a new building and hopefully there will be adequate space for the library.









